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Your Assertive Development Journey

Karen Davies

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Your Assertive Development Journey
1st Edition
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ISBN 978-87-403-0383-4

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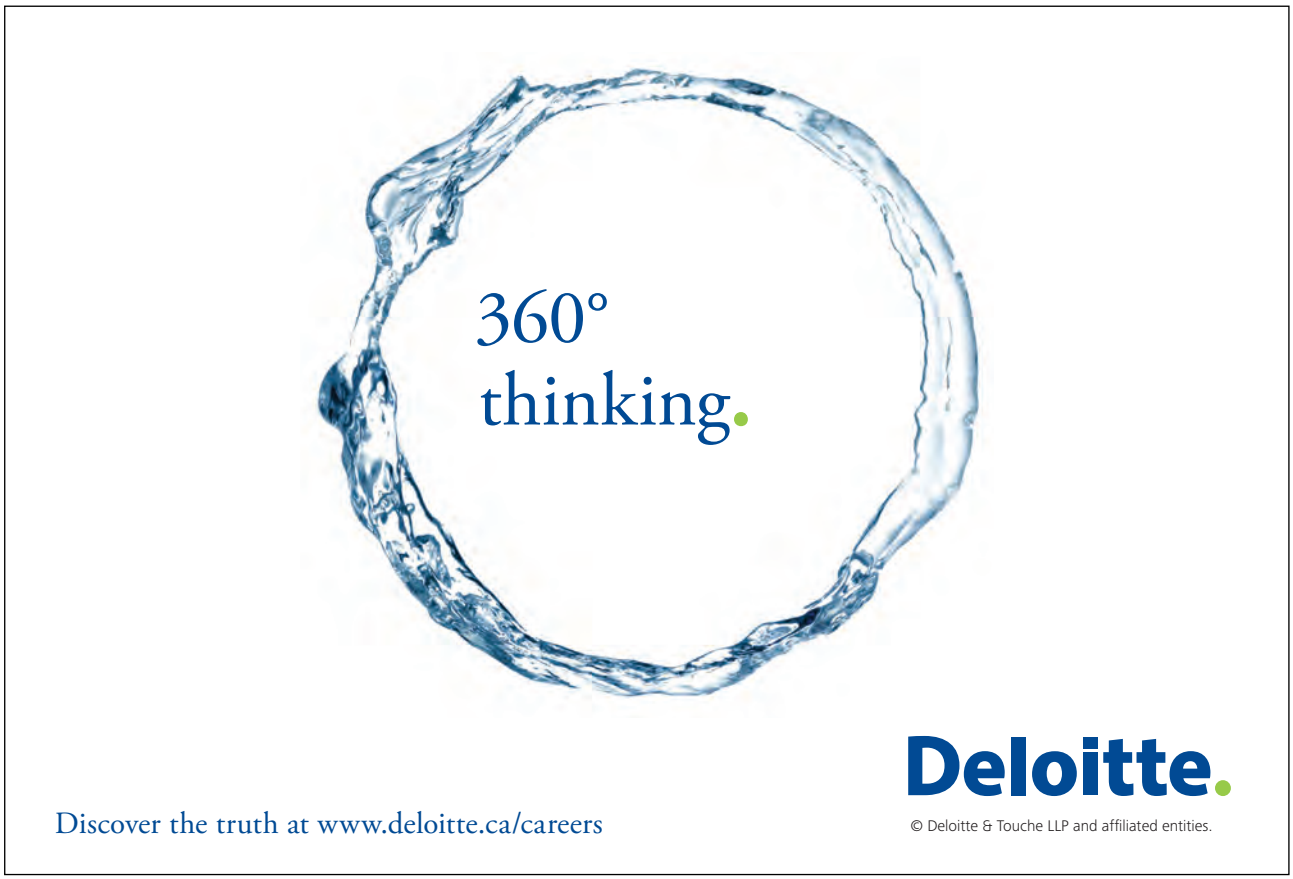

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Preface and Biography

There is a growing realisation that for organisations to thrive in today's marketplace there are a new set of performance rules to play by to maintain a competitive advantage. As a result, businesses are demanding a quantum leap in leadership, customer service and collaborative teamwork.

Developing assertiveness is one sure way of working through each of these performance deliverables. Yet to make a real, sustained difference, we must go beyond learning the generic *assertive norms* – we need a far more profound journey to achieve a meaningful change to performance.

Assertiveness is an interconnected web of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and behaviours. Embarking on a self-development journey creates a focus on authentic, long-lasting change and ultimately, greater success and fulfilment. With a positive mind, constructive behaviours and renewed philosophies, we can finally achieve our full potential **and** meet our organisation's performance requirements.

Whatever your background, seniority or expertise, this book will benefit you at so many levels. If you need to enhance your effectiveness, increase your business impact, lead more dynamically or sell more successfully, then investing in this development journey will prove a valuable asset.

Bringing you this fascinating topic is Karen Davies, who is passionate about her work in developing the art of authentic assertion and confidence.

Whilst Karen has been in the personal development and coaching fields for twenty-five years, it has been in the last fifteen that her work has had the greatest impact, thanks to her own self-discovery journey. After suffering from stress-related depression in 1997, Karen had a unique opportunity to explore herself profoundly and uncover the fundamental triggers that created her health situation. After a cathartic self-development process, she worked through her challenges and these have become the source of her own healing, her inspirational teachings and powerful coaching.

Through her Consultancy, Karen inspired changes in hundreds of executives, leaders and aspiring employees across the globe, achieving success for over thirteen years. Today Karen is role modelling her 'optimise your potential' teachings by shifting her focus from business to personal transformation, inspiring the fulfilment of individuals, through her new vocation – My Well-being.

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Karen's refreshing approach to development is so far beyond the concept of the traditional 'training course'. She uses her coaching philosophy to guide people on a path of self-discovery, building on the notion that teaching is a passive activity; learning is active. You will not just read this eBook, you will take a journey and, engaged by her coaching exercises, have the opportunity to alter the way you think, how you feel and behave in all walks of your life. Your transformation is just around the corner.

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"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

Laozi, Chinese Philosopher

1 Introduction – A New Paradigm

How many times have you read a book, an article or attended a course and been excited at the prospects of changing? After a month, or may be only a few weeks, you realise that inadvertently your old habits have returned to haunt you. How familiar does this sound?

As a coach and facilitator for twenty-five years, I have seen this too often and call this the *sticking plaster* effect. We try to solve a problem with a quick-fix approach, hoping it goes away. Until we get beneath why the problem exists in the first place, we will never achieve sustained change.

Assertive development has historically focused on providing genuine strategies that *should* achieve better results when applied with commitment. So why then, when we're armed with the pledges to change and the desire to practise new techniques do we still feel stuck and frustrated?

I believe there is a missing piece to the assertive jigsaw, a gap in the development process that allows our old patterns to return. That gap is the fundamentals of *introspection* and *self-awareness*.

Author Stephen Covey's inside-out philosophy inspires my approach to personal development and I believe, before we can improve relationships, interact more positively, lead more dynamically or say 'no' confidently, we must first look within. We must be prepared to explore what influences us to behave unassertively, consider what holds us back and review our inner-confidence. This all-important information provides amazing insights into the triggers that shape how we habitually think and feel and the driving force behind our behaviours. Only then can we move forward.

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Without this *inside-out* approach, it is like trying to knit a jumper from a tangled ball of wool. It is a difficult task until it is unravelled. If we want more success, we can no longer rely on the *sticking plaster.* We need the courage to look inside and unravel the intricate web that makes us who we are.

We can then make the profound changes giving us the basis for long-term change. This may feel scary; may-be it is exciting; either way it will be an adventure. As author Susan Jeffers says, "Feel the fear and do it anyway."

1.1 Why Develop Assertiveness?

When you look back at people in your life who have positively influenced you, what is it about them that stand out? Is it their intimidation, their power, their ability to shout above others or their ruthlessness? Perhaps it is their submissiveness, shyness, how they follow others or their willingness to work late regularly.

I suspect it is more likely their leadership, their fairness, their listening skills and support, their clear communication or their delegation ability.

Today's corporate world expects us to step up, deliver tough results and have a competitive edge. Business demands a robustness and strength often misinterpreted as an aggressive standpoint.

The pressure to succeed comes from all avenues; a shareholders' need for ROI, a boss's demands for deliverables, a colleagues' need for collaboration and a team's demands for inspiration. That's before the family's needs and the personal factors that drive job security. All these have a direct and indirect impact on how we behave, often resulting in internal conflicts, anxiety and stress.

It would be easy for us to mould to others' demands, although I believe this causes real stress, which ultimately affects our health and effectiveness. According to a recent survey by *UK's Health and Safety Executive*, self-reported stress and depression accounts for about 12.8 million lost workdays per year. Surely, it's in a business's interest to nurture assertive leaders and not demanding managers; to encourage teams to collaborate and not fight; to promote negotiation rather than bullying.

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1.2 Your Journey to Success – The Assertive Trilogy

Welcome to your self-discovery journey, where you can reflect on your internal map of the world, explore your values and understand how these have shaped the way you think, feel and react today.

My last twenty-five years of running Assertiveness and Personal Development Workshops influence this Trilogy, breaking this thought-provoking topic into the following three essential ingredients:

1.2.1 Part 1 – Getting to Know the Real You

This initial book helps you look inwards and, through your awareness, gain clarity and understanding about what is stopping you from being more consistently assertive. By the end of this eBook, you will understand the modern truth about our behaviour and have seven powerful thinking and behaving strategies to develop your assertion. With knowledge, clarity and strategies you will be compelled to take inspiring action.

1.2.2 Part 2 – Thinking Positively and Communicating Clearly

Part 2 illustrates the role our internal and external communication has on our confidence and interactions.

We examine the evolving science behind the brain, allowing us to explore the quality of your self-esteem and the impact that your inner beliefs have on your world. I will offer you a unique technique that eliminates self-destructive mental programmes, making way for authentic confidence.

In addition, you will leave Part 2 with the tools for clear, concise communication strategies that create influential and meaningful interactions, allowing you to say what you mean positively, empathically and confidently.

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1.2.3 Part 3 – Behaving Confidently

This final eBook gives you the last dose of magic – *situational assertion strategies*.

Selected from real-life events that past-participants have shared, we will cover specific assertive techniques that help deal with particularly difficult experiences or behaviour 'types', arming you with practical tips and guidance. This creates an assertive toolbox you can access to handle any situation more effectively. The result will be a stronger leadership profile, a more influential presence and more solid relationships.

1.3 Personal Expectations

I have written this in the style of a workbook that encourages us to interact. As your personal coach, we will explore what being assertive means in your life-context and help you develop a personal jigsaw that pieces together a picture of powerful insights and self-knowledge, enabling you to review your effectiveness.

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Our journey together will provide solutions to your challenges; enable you to make conscious choices and build an authentic inner confidence serving all areas of your life. There will be exercises encouraging you to reflect and journalise and I encourage you to take time to think profoundly around key questions that help you, ultimately, make a meaningful change to your performance.

If you are ready, let's take the first step.

"The beginning is the most important part of the work."

Plato

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"Would you tell me please which way I ought to go from here? That depends a good deal on where you want to get to."

Alice in Wonderland – Lewis Carol

2 Assertive Clarity

Before uncovering some assertive myths, I would like you to think about why you have downloaded this eBook and what you hope to learn. Please answer the following questions to get clarity about what assertive development means to you:

1. Create a vision of what you imagine yourself looking, sounding and feeling like, in one year's time, having completed this eBook. What is different?
2. What factors do you think stop you from behaving assertively and what type of situations challenge you the most?
3. Given the above two questions, what do you most need to learn and what benefit will these changes bring you personally and professionally?

2.1 What Is Assertiveness?

Assertiveness is one of four behaviours that we exhibit through our actions, body language and facial expressions; the other three are passive, aggressive and passive-aggressive. Each one is an external projection of our thoughts and emotions, providing the basis for our interactions. Therefore, the quality of our relationships and a situation's outcome depends upon the behaviour we display.

Here is a question to ponder:

Are we born assertive?

My belief is that we are **not** born assertive, it is a learned behaviour and here is why I believe that.

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Think about an animal born in the wild; one of their early instincts is to stand and walk. These innate reflexes enable them to either *run from danger* or *stand up to fight*. Their mother does not teach these skills; they are primal, biological impulses that ensure the newborn's survival. As humans, we are powered by that same notion.

Bruce Lipton in his book, The Biology of Belief says, *"Instincts are built-in behaviours that are fundamental to the survival of all humans, independent of what culture they belong to or what time in human history they were born."*

We call these instinctive behaviours:

Fight or Flight

This term was first coined by American physiologist Walter Cannon in 1920s, summarising the theory as a complex chain of chemical reactions within the body that mobilise us to deal with danger. Those chemicals and hormones react in such a way that energy moves from our brain, liver and kidneys towards our heart, lungs and muscles to prepare us for action.

Have you ever noticed when you have faced danger, your mind blanks, rational thought disappears and your body just seems to move automatically? This is not a logical reaction; it is a natural instinct we are born with.

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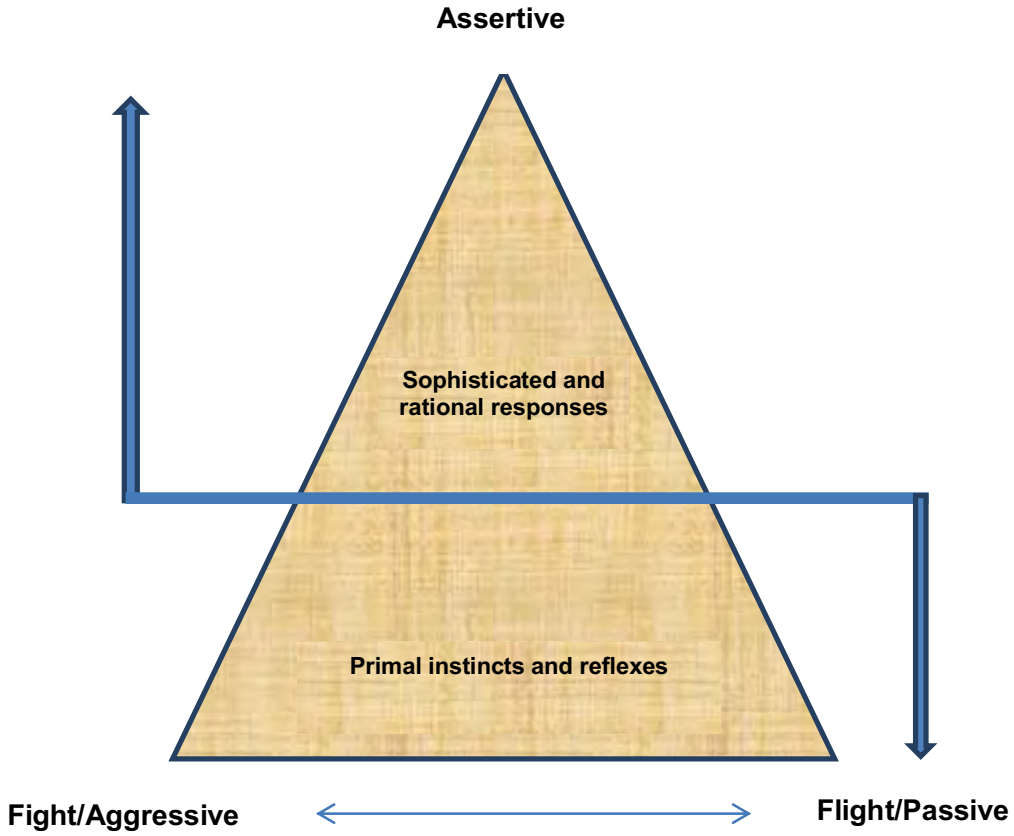
In today's language, *fight or flight* translates as ***aggressive*** or ***passive*** – and these primal behaviours ensure our survival.

Born with both instincts, we learn from our parents or guardians, situations and our environment, which very quickly forms our conditioning and our beliefs. The result is that we subconsciously develop a default for either aggression or passivity and although we use both, we generally err towards one or the other as a predominant pattern.

This default remains with us and whilst we learn new techniques, we still gravitate towards our primal, instinctive pattern. It's not until adulthood that our brains develop a more sophisticated way of thinking and an alternative, more appropriate behaviour becomes apparent, offering better quality interactions and solutions. Under stress, we will tend to revert to that default, although with practise we can eliminate its primal impact through assertive development.

Author Peter Honey says, *"All the other, more sophisticated behaviours develop through a process of learning and are thus more 'made' than 'born'."*

What is the moral of this story? I believe that we are born with a genetic make-up and a set of instinctive, primal behaviours, one of which becomes a preference and that we use throughout our lives. Assertion, as a more sophisticated behaviour, we learn and through practise and repetition can be adopted as a more dominant pattern.



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2.2 Assertive Myths and Irrational Beliefs

Now we understand that fight and fight are primal reactions and we can learn assertiveness, we are ready to remove some old myths and irrational beliefs that have formed around assertive behaviour.

- **"I can't change the habits of a lifetime."** Not true. Whilst our behaviour patterns are habitual, they are the easiest characteristic we can change, through repetition. It therefore becomes more about *a desire to change* rather than the *possibility of changing*.
- **Assertiveness is just for women and weak men.** Wrong again. Everyone has the right and opportunity to learn a more confident, natural, fair and effective style. Assertive development is a highly inclusive topic, even for those who already consider themselves assertive.
- **Assertiveness is shouting just a little bit louder.** This is an often-held misconception although you don't need to raise your voice to be heard. There's a great quote that is at the heart of being assertive, which says,

'*Don't raise your voice, improve your argument.*'

- **"People will think I've become selfish, bossy and rude."** Again, not true. When we learn the basis of assertion, we realise it isn't about being pushy. It is about keeping calm, stating confidently how you feel and interacting clearly and honestly. Assertive behaviour recognises that you have the right to ask for what you need – that is not bossy or rude.
- **"I will lose sight of who I really am."** Interestingly, assertive development allows you to become *more* of who you are – the authentic you. All too often, our default behaviours become masks that protect us and yet assertion allows the true person to emerge, through the art of honesty, self-expression and confidence.
- **Women lose their femininity when they assert themselves.** This is a very out-of-date view as women have as much right to ask for what they need, why should that result in a loss of femininity? An assertive approach often results in greater respect, as women banish their primal defaults creating greater admiration amongst their colleagues.
- **"I shouldn't have to say what I need: people close to me should know."** Not true. Despite our best endeavours, we are not telepathic and we must learn to express what we need in order to achieve our goals. When we leave it to guesswork, we limit our potential for success.

2.3 Differentiating Behavioural Characteristics

Before we leave this chapter, I want to clarify what ***assertiveness is and is not***. The above listed myths show that some irrational beliefs exist and yet in my experience, I believe that assertiveness has now evolved into something more inclusive, constructive and insightful.

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To get this ball rolling, here are two thoughts to reflect on:

How would you **define assertive behaviour** and what characteristics would you use to describe it?

Of the people you know, who would you describe as being **aggressive and passive?** What do you notice about their actions, their language and the way they interact?

A widely supported assertive definition is:

Assertiveness is expressing your wants and needs without violating the wants and needs of others.

2.3.1 Behavioural Differentiation – A Summary

This summary defines all four behaviours enabling you to conduct a preliminary assessment of which box best represents your predominant pattern.

Assertive This behaviour focuses on natural, calm and rational outputs, adopting a ***win-win*** philosophy. It operates from choice, measured responses and consideration of others. Assertor's own needs are honoured, yet not at the expense of others, resulting in a collaborative interaction seeking compromise and resolution. With a high self-esteem, an assertor feels secure, can listen actively and express themselves clearly without anxiety. Driven by choice and appropriateness, an assertor may temporarily use aggression or passivity, whilst recognising the need to return to assertion as their predominant pattern.	**Aggressive** This behaviour operates from a dominant ***win-lose*** position. Low self-esteem and insecurity trigger this behaviour and aggressors use it as a way of gaining power to feel more secure. Aggressors use force, volume and emotion to express themselves and they invest in securing their own needs before the needs of others. Aggressors command, demand and defend instinctively when threatened. An aggressor's primal and irrational reaction can result in a passive swing, as they often feel guilty about their actions, fear rejection and consequently can feel insecure.
Passive This behaviour operates from a ***people-pleasing, lose-win*** position. They invest in satisfying other people's needs, often at their own expense. With a low self-esteem, passives are insecure and strive to gain approval and affection. Their behaviour focuses on agreeing, complying and fostering dependency to ensure their security. They rarely express themselves honestly as the fear of rejection or ridicule is overriding. They project timid, shy and quietly spoken interactions where fear, anxiety and worry are key triggers for their behaviour.	**Passive Aggressive** Passive Aggressive also operates from a ***win-lose*** position, although has a more indirect nature to it. Someone interacting with a passive aggressor is often unclear about where they stand, as facades and hidden agendas can be a feature here. Insecurity is once again a driver, with a fear of speaking 'the truth' in case it offends. Yet a passive aggressor can do as much damage just with less power than the aggressor. A need for security and protection dominates this behaviour, although they invest in a more subtle and indirect expression of their needs.

2.3.2 Self-assessment Questionnaire – An Introduction

Understanding how you come across and judging the right behaviours to use for a given situation requires a high level of self-awareness. This does not mean you have to be a chameleon. It is about considering the outcome you need, recognising that each situation or person may require a different approach and adapting your style appropriately to achieve a win-win.

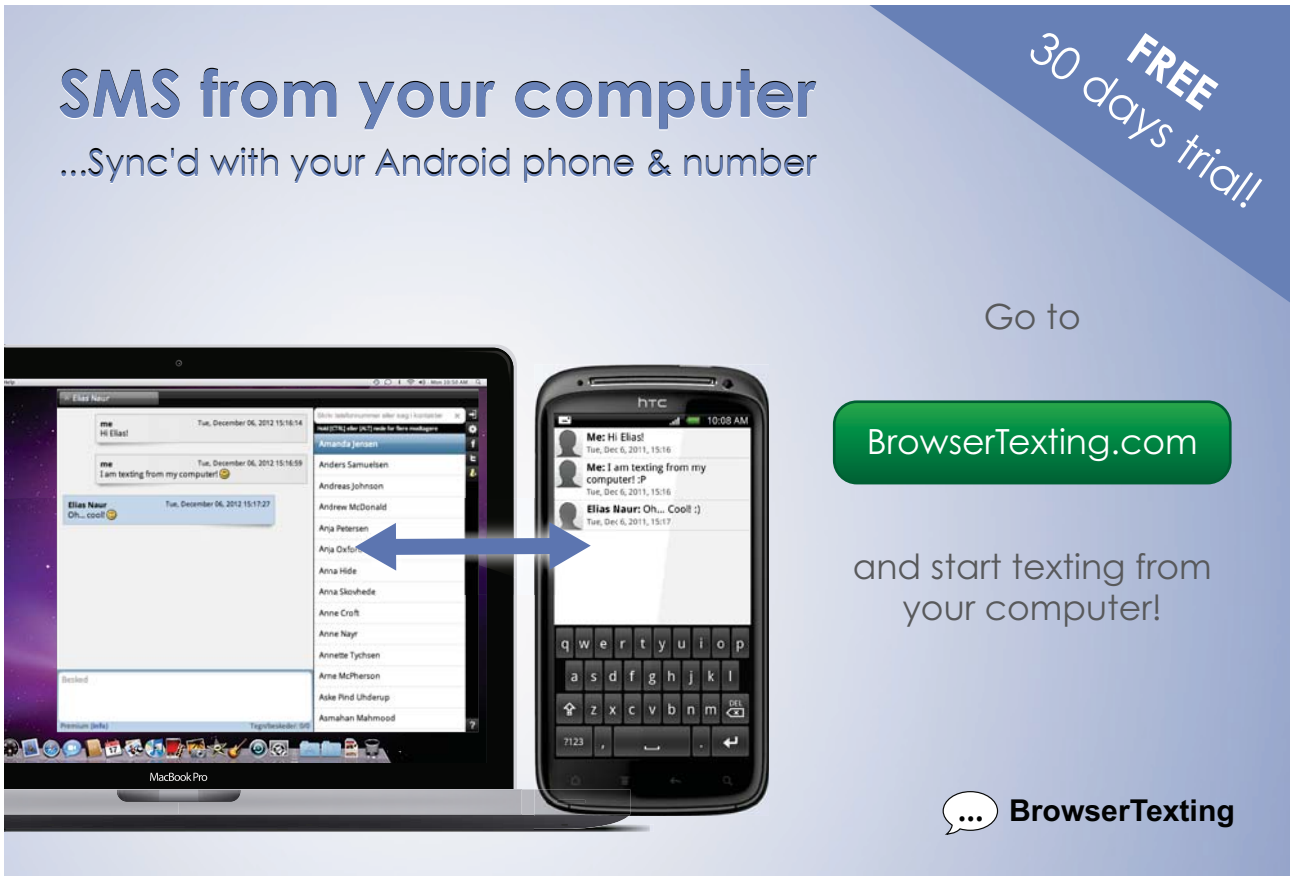
The following questionnaire guides you to learn more about your behavioural patterns, how much assertiveness you currently adopt and therefore where you need to focus your development.

There are a limited number of questions for you to answer so the result is not necessarily conclusive, although it will indicate your preference, which lends itself to further self-study.

Please work through the questions, answering them as honestly as you can. Get your journal ready so you can assess the results. Avoid giving answers you think are the 'right' ones; answer honestly, based on how you believe you currently behave, as this will improve the assessment's accuracy.

2.3.3 Self-assessment Questionnaire

Before learning how to develop assertiveness, it is important to review where you are right now and which behaviour is your predominant pattern. From this you can then focus your efforts in the best and right places for maximum impact.



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Read each set of five questions, assigning a number to each box using the scale below. Total your scores in the shaded box, which correspond to the Behavioural Differentiation Summary.

Always true for me	Often true	Rarely true	Never true for me
4	3	2	1

1. I appreciate people's views, even if they differ to mine. ☐
2. I listen to people; they find me approachable and easy to talk to. ☐
3. I ask for help easily, without feeling anxious or uncomfortable. ☐
4. I can express my feelings and opinions constructively and calmly. ☐
5. I take time to think about my responses and their consequences. ☐

Assertive Total ☐

1. If others are rude to me, I am rude or sarcastic back. ☐
2. I am uncomfortable letting go of my work and delegating tasks. ☐
3. If I disagree with someone, I 'stick to my guns' no matter what. ☐
4. I consider myself hot headed and little things easily aggravate me. ☐
5. Under stress, I get short and snappy with people. ☐

Aggressive Total ☐

1. I will do all I can to avoid confrontation by trying to keep the peace. ☐
2. I hate holding eye contact as it feels like I'm starring. ☐
3. I work hard to meet people's needs, usually at my own expense. ☐
4. When asked to do something, I say 'yes' in case I upset them. ☐
5. In the presence of authority, I feel intimidated and flustered. ☐

Passive Total ☐

1. If I want someone to do a job, I praise and compliment them first. ☐
2. If someone upsets me, I find a way of getting my own back, subtly. ☐
3. I like to control others through behind-the-scene manoeuvres. ☐
4. I hide behind humour and sarcasm to avoid difficult situations. ☐
5. If I don't like someone, I subtly let them know by excluding them from events. ☐

Passive Aggressive Total ☐

Turn over the page to analyse your scores.

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2.3.4 Self-assessment Questionnaire – Understanding your Scores

You can now interpret your scores using the following information:

- The **highest** of your four **totals** may indicate that this is your predominant behaviour.
- If that highest score is **15–20**, this may indicate a particularly strong preference for that behaviour.
- The **lowest** of all your **totals** may indicate that this is your least preferred pattern of behaviour.
- If that lowest score is **10 or below,** may indicate how infrequently, you use this behaviour.
- If all your **totals** are low, this may indicate an overall level of passivity, showing a lack of self-assurance and doubt in your ability when answering the questions.
- If **assertive and passive totals are close**, this may indicate a strengthening of your assertive approach. It shows you are asserting yourself more often, although a predominant passive insecurity influences a retreat to a people-pleasing position.
- If **passive and aggressive totals are close**, this may indicate a low self-esteem and insecurity, which underlies both behaviours. You may, for example, bottle up emotions and then explode with frustration when you can take no more. You then feel guilty about your outburst and return to a passive standpoint.
- If **assertive and aggressive totals are close**, this may indicate an imbalance of your self-expression and a dominant feeling of frustration. As you experiment with your assertion, you may still find yourself shouting or finger pointing when you struggle to get your views across. This will rebalance the more you practise.
- Return to the **three non-assertive question sets** and review your **3 and 4 scores**. Consider and journalise the reasons behind your scores to those specific questions.
- Return to the **assertive question set** and review your **1 and 2 scores**. Explore what stops you from scoring higher and journalise your results.
- Return to your **assertive question set** and review your **3 and 4 scores**. Acknowledge the situations where you already behave assertively and explore what gives you the confidence to behave this way.

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2.4 Self-assessment Summary and Exercise

Self-assessment Summary

The questionnaire helps you build a better understanding of your behaviour patterns and so before we move on to Chapter 3, it would be useful to build on your discoveries.

1. Based on the questionnaire exercise, test out your results over the next two weeks. Form a more concrete analysis by talking to people you trust about how they see you; notice your behaviours in action and take note of the patterns that are most dominant for you.

2. Explore whether these behaviour patterns are different at work versus at home. If they are different, explore why that might be and what is it about one domain that produces a more confident behaviour the other?

3. Notice specific situations or people that influence you to react in an unassertive way. What is it about the person or event that provokes that reaction?

This brings us to the end of Chapter 2 and the first step towards self-awareness and the assemblage of your personal jigsaw. The profound self-discovery comes in the next chapter, helping you to explore what is behind your patterns and make sense of the emerging picture.

"Our greatest enemies, the ones we must fight most often, are within."

Thomas Paine

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"Better; that can be a tricky thing to find. It's only when you are curious enough to discover something new that you can find something better."

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3 Why We Do What We Do

Based on the last two chapters, you are building up a solid picture about assertiveness and what this means to you. This next chapter intends to pique your curiosity and help you make connections about how past influences have shaped your current behaviour. These insights have proved invaluable to past-participants and produced genuine 'light-bulb' moments, enabling them to move forward with strength and acceptance.

Example

I recall one woman who reviewed her family's influence; she had five elder brothers. Understanding her family position and its dynamic helped her realise why she had developed a primal, 'fight' behaviour. Driven by a need to earn her siblings' respect and ensure her survival, she found herself developing an overt personality, a loud and commanding voice and, as seen by her work colleagues, a real dominant and competitive character. Once she realised it was her family environment that shaped her behaviour and that this did not make her a 'bad person', she felt released from her self-doubt, allowing her the freedom to change.

3.1 How we Experience the World

Just for a moment, take note of what's around you or outside your nearest window: notice the people, the objects, and the noises. How often do you reflect on these things?

We rarely stop to really look or listen to what is around us and yet subconsciously our brains are assimilating this information and using it to form the basis of thoughts, decisions and actions. Every moment something happens, we are evaluating it; how it feels; what we think about it and whether it poses any threat to our survival. Our mind and body are ready to take whatever primal action is needed to protect us.

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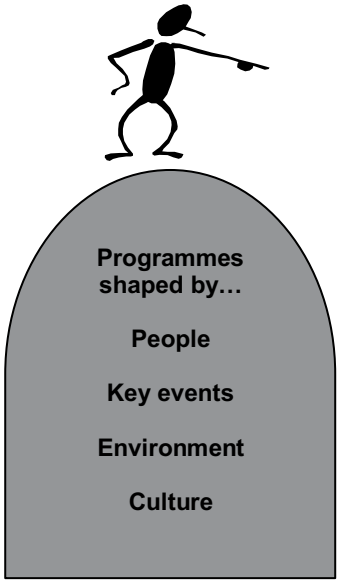
Our mind is interpreting everything we see, feel and experience, *right now,* based on what has happened in our past. It is like having a unique library of programmes that our mind accesses to work out what we must do.

To make this visual, imagine that you are standing on top of a hill. Downloaded onto that hill are all your life experiences and lessons. As you view the world, you are processing that information and unconsciously making decisions based upon your hill's unique set of programmes. I would like to show you this more graphically.

3.2 Our Hilltop of Experience

Four main factors shape our view of the world: people, events, environment and culture. Our experiences of these factors then influence our beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours, many of which remain with us throughout our lives if left unchallenged. From the moment we are born, what we observe and experience begins to construct our hilltop and influence the way we handle situations in adulthood.



As infants our brains are constantly taking in information although it is not sophisticated enough to critically evaluate the 'good' from the 'bad'. We absorb everything and our deep-rooted, subconscious programmes, patterns and beliefs about ourselves start to form. This becomes our hard-drive where all our programmes, determining our future actions, are stored.

The belief is that by age seven, we have already formed the unique features of our personality and behaviour patterns. Whilst subsequent events continue to influence us, our main programmes have been set.

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These programmes influence how we deal with every situation we face from our knowledge of how to walk, to our ability to stay disciplined whilst on a diet or our subtle sabotage of New Year's Resolutions. They also shape how we interact with danger or threat, how we handle conflict and our reaction to bad news.

3.2.1 Four Factors Influencing our Hilltop

- **People**

Our parents or guardians are major influences. They are the first people we see, who are responsible for our upbringing and who start shaping how we see the world. They contribute to creating our 'truths'.

Latest science suggests that their influence can even precede birth. During pregnancy, life's events will have an impact on parent's physiology and emotions and the unborn baby notices every one of their vibrations.

The more familiar science suggests their influence is most significant after birth. We watch, listen, learn and even download their language to our subconscious memory. As a result, our parent's beliefs and philosophies become ours.

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Clients often ask how two siblings can have completely different beliefs, perceptions and behaviours. This is easy to answer. Child 1 is born to new parents who have no experience or training in parenthood responsibility. Child 2 is born to parents who have learnt and grown into their role, thereby influencing child 2 with a revised set of standards, principles and experiences. The result is that the younger child's hilltop will be different to their elder sibling.

A point to acknowledge; we must not blame our parents for their influence. When we understand the roots of our programming and realise that we can change how we respond to those programmes, we take responsibility for improving our 'lot' rather than becoming victims of the past or our parents.

We must, of course acknowledge the role family, friends, teachers and other authority figures have on our programming. Everyone you had a significant connection to in your childhood leaves an impression on your hard-drive. I found as an only child I came to value solitude and even today, my independent streak can be rooted to having no siblings. I also have a strong memory of my Geography teacher. He had a fierce determination to ensure we all passed **his** exam and this reinforced my programme about not letting people down, fearing failure and therefore creating a pressure to succeed.

- **Events**

This covers a broad range of historical situations that can extend from family deaths, bullying, illness and some of those unspeakable events that haunt us; to less intense events like house moves, changing schools or rows with friends. Each event may just be a moment in time or months in the unfolding.

One powerful event I often replay is of three inseparable friends at Junior School who, one day had a disagreement. In the heat of the argument, the two girls paired up and left me alone. Whilst we made up, the event left an indelible mark and I return to this as a key event in the formation of my *people pleasing* and *avoidance* behaviour. Deep in my conditioning, I have a programme that says people will leave you after a row, so avoid conflict at all costs. How interesting!

Example

I remember one client describing the impact growing up in a Care Home had on him. He recognised that to survive he learned to be ruthless, strong and dominant and these behaviours remained with him into his management career. Once he realised the root of his behaviour, he was able to take control and learn a more constructive way of interacting – this one realisation changed his whole outlook on life and his leadership impact.

- **Environment**

This is all about the setting and atmosphere surrounding you as a child. So for example, your family's size and gender make up, your position with your siblings, the family dynamic and culture.

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Did you have a noisy, energising family environment, with people always moving, talking and playing? Alternatively, did you experience a peaceful environment that brought out a reflective nature? We could extend this to cover the environment in which you lived; was it a village or town? How safe was your street – did you feel safe playing outside until dark? Did you live on an island, in the country, down a remote lane or inner city? All these affect the way you see the world today.

- **Culture**

Culture is the ideas, customs and social behavioural characteristics of a particular group or society who create a set of spoken or unspoken 'truths' about the nature of that group.

That definition provides good logic for why culture determines our subconscious programming. Depending upon your country or city of birth, your family's religious beliefs or clubs you join, each play a unique part in moulding how you think and behave. The group's collective views, 'truths' and rules provide a structure for how you operate together and so, through repetition, you begin to absorb those rules into your own philosophies and they provide a benchmark for how you live your life and behave in the workplace.

Example

I ran a twelve-month leadership programme with multi-cultural participants: Manx, English, Dutch, German, Swiss and South African. It was fascinating to watch how such a diverse group worked together and, during their year, created their own culture. Whilst individually their country cultures shaped their personal interactions, they soon found a way to work through their differences enabling them to collaborate effectively without dishonouring their individual cultures.

3.3 Your Hilltop Exercise

Reflect on what has shaped your hilltop, using the four headings. Identify what key elements have conditioned you to see the world as you do.

This is a powerful exercise, so do take care whilst working through it, as some difficult connections may arise for you. If this happens, then perhaps just write it down and then leave it for a while before trying to understand its impact on you.

If thinking about historical specifics is too difficult, then you could change your perspective. Using the present, take one of your behavioural traits and ask, 'What has happened in the past that has influenced me to behave in this way today?'

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3.4 Other People's Hilltops

So far, we have used the hilltop analogy as a tool for self-assessment. This model also works for understanding other people's hilltops. As we explore assertiveness further, especially in Part 3, we revisit this notion and use it as a tool for developing greater appreciation of others and avoiding conflict and confrontation.

Although for now, this is a significant step in your assertive development, taken with a huge dose of courage. We will take just one more step in the next chapter.

"Give me a child of seven and I will show you the man."

Jesuit saying

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"Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom."

Lao Tzu

4 Building your Jigsaw

You are piecing together some important elements of your personal jigsaw helping you to understand yourself better. Now you need some structure to form a bigger picture – if you like adding the corner pieces to your assertive jigsaw.

This chapter is highly interactive and so I encourage you to take the time to think about what the questions mean to you. The more you invest in this section, the longer lasting your assertive development will be.

When you understand what is at the heart of your behaviour, attitudes and decisions, you will find clarity and realisation knock on your door, offering you options to change.

4.1 Personal Building Blocks

To illustrate the building blocks that make us up, I would like use the analogy of a tree: A tree is organised into a number of key components that enable it to function.

The Roots: provide the tree's nourishment, running deep underground and rarely seen by the onlooker. They are vital to the very essence of the tree's existence and maintain its vitality.

The Trunk and Branches: provide the tree's stability and structure, which are essential for transporting the nutrients from roots to leaves.

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The Foliage: defines the tree's identity. How it flourishes depends on many things, although without its interaction with the roots and trunk, the foliage suffers and presents an unhealthy image.

Using this imagery, we can now see how these layers relate to us:

Inner Core: like the tree's root system, we too have a deeply engrained, invisible network of needs, conditioning, values, beliefs and principles that subconsciously feed and shape our lives.

Mind-sets: driven by our inner core, our attitudes, philosophies and perspectives take shape, affecting how we react to the world.

Behaviours: this is the external display of our inner programmes and portrays our identity and image. Through our vocal, verbal and habitual patterns, we project an image and create interactions that form the basis of our relationships.

When you understand the intricate interplay of these three layers, you get a real sense of how they represent you. The following exercises will help you explore each of these layers to create a more profound self-awareness.

4.2 Your Roots – Inner Core

There are many rooted elements we could explore, although from my coaching perspective there are two essential activities. Firstly, I encourage you to look at your values, the cornerstone of your decisions. Secondly I ask you to assess your needs and drivers to see how they trigger your primal behaviour patterns.

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4.2.1 Values

Values are like having a personal compass. They are deep-rooted standards that form in childhood and evolve as we age. They are the basis on which we structure our attitudes, are the source of our actions and the foundation of our choices.

If your values differ either to your organisation's perspective, your boss's value system or a family member's, it creates conflict. In fact, if at any point in your life, you feel unhappy, just check out how aligned you are to your values. I suspect that one of them is out of kilter and once you restore that value's priority your conflict disappears.

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Example

I recall a client telling me how miserable she felt at home and when we explored why, it came to light that she placed a high value on organisation and order. Unfortunately, her husband didn't and it created conflict between them. She realised that her need for order was verging on an unhealthy obsession as it impacted elsewhere in her life. We unearthed that one of her hilltop experiences had created a deep-rooted fear of danger and vulnerability. To protect herself from harm, she had developed a strong value around control and order.

This insight gave her a completely different perspective about her value and its impact, enabling her to adjust the significance she placed on it. This helped her have a meaningful conversation with her husband about how she felt and they found a compromise that created some of the order she craved.

By assessing our values, we are able to see where conflicts come from; gauge the impact dishonouring our values has and leads to better quality relationships with those around you.

Before I ask you to consider your values, here's an insight into my **core values**:

Choice, simplicity, making a difference, family, love, integrity, gratitude and health

My **peripheral values** still matter to me, although have less dominance in my decision-making, at this moment in time. As circumstances change, these peripheral values may become more important.

Adventure, independence, exploration, privacy, nature, structure, security and creativity

Your Core and Peripheral Values Exercise

1. Highlight as many of the values from the list over the page that strike a cord with you.
2. Then identify your **core values** by **prioritising your top seven**. If you have only chosen seven, then **select your top three**.
3. Finally, if you had to pick **the** most important value for you, right now, which would it be and how does it influence your decision-making? Which values are currently out of kilter and which do you feel totally aligned to?

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- Peace
- Independence
- Ambition
- Friendship
- Being analytical
- Boundaries
- Making decisions
- Taking risks
- Excitement and fun
- Integrity
- Pressure
- Working with others
- Leadership
- Being a team player
- Nurturing
- Recognition
- Pleasing people
- Adventure
- Innovation
- Expertise
- Flexibility
- Problem-solving
- Collaboration
- Family and friends
- Knowledge
- Attention to detail
- Caring
- Decisiveness
- Physical challenge
- Honesty and openness
- Contact with people
- Precision
- Variety
- Competition
- Freedom
- Status
- Creativity
- Order and control
- Career progression
- Safety and security
- Money
- Challenge
- Routine
- Community
- Dominance
- Self-expression
- Helping others
- Perfectionism

4.2.2 Six Basic Human Needs

Our needs form part of a subconscious network of intrinsic drivers that instil action at a primal level. They are more than, 'I need a new car.' They are yearnings created by our early hilltop experiences and create a reflexive behaviour aimed at fulfilling those needs.

The following model, adapted from author Tony Robbins helps explain the role our needs have in shaping our behaviours. When I first saw this, the penny dropped. It explained two things: firstly, why I was so passionate about my job, given the height of my **need for contribution** and secondly, why I needed so much structure and control in my life, given my **need for certainty**.

Six Basic Human Needs

- Certainty
- Uncertainty
- Significance
- Connection/community
- Contribution (adding value)
- Growth

Certainty: is the assurance of something happening or not happening. For example, the need to know that the car will start and get us to work on time or having a routine to our day that presents no surprises, therefore allowing us to perform at our best.

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Uncertainty: conversely is the excitement of the unknown and the need for variability. As an example, you may go on holiday without booking any accommodation – you just 'go where the fancy takes you.' A leader would love the diversity of working with different cultures and would hate the regimented structure that others needing certainty would crave.

Significance: is the need to be remembered, to be important and for our lives to mean something. Examples might be former UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair and may be even Albert Einstein.

Connection: is the need to be part of a community or group and share in the meaning of that connection. This need is all about acceptance, inclusion and feeling cared for and loved. You will see examples of people joining community groups like work's Social or Charity Committee or Parent Teacher Associations and UK's Women's Institute as part of a need to belong.

Contribution: is the altruistic need to make a difference to someone or something. People with a high contribution need are driven by activities that add real value to someone's life.

Growth: is all about the desire to learn, develop and improve. You will often find people with a high growth need taking on extra studies or exams in their personal time, even when they seem overloaded with other responsibilities.

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Example

Working with a client recently, she described feeling frustrated by her sister who was desperate to spend time with her and would often 'pop in on the off-chance.' We explored this using this model and it became clear that my client's sister had a high connection need driving her behaviours. Interestingly my client had *certainty* as her top need and *connection* came third, further validating her frustration towards the unplanned visits.

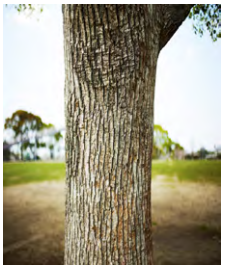
This insight led to her behaving more compassionately and has since diarised fortnightly visits where they can spend some quality time together, free of frustration and meeting both sets of needs.

Your Six Basic Human Needs

Using the descriptions over the page, consider the order of your needs. You may find it easier to start with the highest and lowest, and then work out your middle needs, as thes can be harder to differentiate.

When you are happy with your order, journalise the impact that order has on your behaviours – how do you behave to fulfil your top ranking needs?

4.3 Your Trunk – Mind-sets



The trunk and branches provide the backbone to your behaviour; namely your attitudes, emotions, perspectives and perceptions. Essentially, how you feel and think about the world.

We look more closely at how we think in Part 2, so I don't want to spoil the surprise in this book, although mindsets and emotions are certainly worth our attention.

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4.3.1 Mind-sets and Thinking Styles

How we view things is so important to how we behave. Recall the last time everything seemed to be going wrong. How many destructive ideas and assumptions were running through your mind at that time? What impact did they have on you and on the people around you?

When we hold unhealthy assumptions about others, or ourselves it can have a disturbing effect on our behaviour. It is like wearing a set of glasses that are out of focus; your view can become distorted and we risk our misconceptions affecting our relationships, our health and our professional reputation.

Imagine you are visiting a new country; you quickly accumulate impressions of what you see and develop views based on your previous experiences. You then form an opinion and perhaps a judgement on the culture, the people and its architecture. You may even find yourself comparing it to other countries you have been to and using that perspective to draw some unfair conclusions.

Now imagine you are visiting that same country with a friend who has a completely different perspective to you. They develop their own set of notions and assumptions shaped by their previous experiences and therefore see it differently to you. Which perspective is right?

Both are right and both viewpoints are relevant. Our challenge is to appreciate that a different opinion is just as valid and the difference doesn't make either person wrong.

It shows us there is another way, a different view and more than one way of seeing things. It is good to acknowledge your current viewpoint on certain topics and then develop a willingness to accept that there are other ways to see things. This can help tremendously in the work context as you can begin to form a more flexible approach that gives equal space to everyone's opinions without you having to judge them as right or wrong; they are just different.

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Here are some powerful questions you can ask to expand your mind-set:

How else could I think about this?

How would someone else see this?

What is the alternative view?

This will help flex your mental muscle, challenging you to expand your perspective and to search for a viewpoint that helps you and others feel more constructive during your interactions.

4.3.2 Crooked Styles of Thinking

Our thoughts influence how we feel and our feelings affect how we think. This partnership is quite dramatic in the way it shapes our behaviour. Feelings and thoughts influence each other all the time; if you think you have failed – you are likely to feel disappointed in yourself and this perpetuates into more self-destructive thoughts, and so the chain reaction continues. This is one example of what is called ***crooked styles of thinking*** and they have a huge impact on how you are likely to feel.

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Crooked Styles of Thinking

1. The Catastrophe Predicting the worst outcome.	**2. Over-generalising** Assuming that because something happened once, it will happen again.
3. Exaggerating Giving negative events more importance than they deserve.	**4. Discounting the Positive** Rejecting the good things as if they did not count.
5. Mind Reading Believing that you know what others are thinking.	**6. Predicting the Future** Fortune telling what you imagine to happen in the future.
7. Black and White Thinking Switching from one extreme to another.	**8. Taking Things Personally** Always seeing the attack on your character
9. Taking the Blame Taking responsibility for something that isn't yours.	**10. Emotional Reasoning** Mistaking feelings for facts.
11. Name Calling Involving either yourself or others.	**12. Scare Mongering** An irrational perspective that is just an illusion.
13. Wishful Thinking Things would be better if they only they were different.	

Which of these crooked styles of thinking can you can relate to most? As evidence of these thought patterns, take note of real examples over the next couple of days. Identify the type of emotions they bring up for you.

4.4 Your Foliage – Behaviour

The final part of our tree concept is the foliage, which consists of everything visible to others, on which they form an impression. This includes: your body language, facial expressions, your style of dress, how you sound and your words. This behaviour can be split into two elements; **our reactions**, which are instinctive and **our responses**, which are reasoned and rational. When developing assertion, it is of course the latter on which we must focus.

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4.4.1 Reaction Formula

The key to our assertion is moving away from that primal **fight and flight** reaction to a considered response. Here's a Reaction Formula that illustrates the interplay between our innate thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

Trigger = (Thought + Feeling) x Behaviour = Interaction

The best way to bring this to life is to describe a personal situation, which thankfully is now resolved, although illustrates how this formula works.

One of my unhealthiest patterns was my road-rage – here's the chain of events:

Trigger	A car would overtake me in dangerous conditions or flash me to move.
Thought	'What an idiot, don't you know how much danger you're causing?' Alternatively, 'How dare you flash me, I'm not driving slowly.' Or, 'You incompetent, crazy *****. Don't you know how ridiculous that was?'
Feeling	Anger, rage, irritation, resentment.
Behaviour	The combination of my instantaneous thoughts and feelings resulted in an aggressive outpouring of gesticulations, flashing and horn honking, accelerating, driving up close and risking my own life.
Interaction	My reactions to this event could have triggered, in the protagonist, their own rage, forcing me to stop my car and having a high-risk altercation. Thankfully, this never happened. Generally, it would result in a return of gesticulations, horn blasting and speeding off.
Result	This pattern of intense anger would stay with me for hours, carrying the emotion home and taking it out on my husband. He was always left wondering what he had done wrong and I felt awful, because I felt out of control.

So what can be done? Well after therapy and understanding why my pattern existed, it dissolved. Although interestingly I visited my Timeline Practitioner primarily for weight management issues and came away with losing my road rage. What I learned was that you don't need therapy to deal with these behaviour patterns, instead you need to:

Find a way to interrupt the pattern.

4.4.2 Interrupting the Pattern

1. Firstly, you need to understand what **triggers** you to think and feel a certain way. Understand what really 'makes you mad'; what buttons are pushed to 'make your blood boil.' This is the first way you can interrupt your pattern. When you become aware of your triggers, you are half way to resolving the impact is has on you.

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2. Next, examine how to change the **thought** into something less destructive. For example, you could **flip the thought** into something more positive, 'No harm done.' You could turn it into a question, 'I wonder what's going on for them today?' Developing a more rational perspective will limit the intensity of your emotion and will prevent the chain reaction.
3. You could interrupt at the f**eeling** by simply acknowledging how mad you feel. A simple, 'I feel really angry about what's just happened.' By taking yourself straight back into a thought, you have interrupted the behaviour cycle and immediately moved into something more rational.
4. The last and most important interruption is the **behaviour**. *Realising that you have a choice about the way you behave* is vital. As soon as you take responsibility for your actions, your behaviours can change, after all:

"No one can make you feel anything without your consent." Eleanor Roosevelt

4.4.3 Responding not Reacting

The final element in our foliage is to summarise the distinction between a **primal reaction** and an **assertive response**. Stephen Covey in his book, 'Seven habits for highly effective people.' states this as the **freedom to choose**.

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We all have this basic freedom and yet it is more about whether we *decide to exercise it*. Realising we have this option to choose our thoughts, responses and behaviours is empowering and is an essential ingredient of our assertion. Understanding what *influences* us it important, although so too is the realisation that we can take responsibility for our choices, actions and thoughts – this is a cornerstone to assertive development.

The **freedom to choose** is about developing a **habit of proactivity**. This means taking responsibility for our behaviour and our destinies. So rather than blaming others and things that are out of our control, we need to recognise the importance of responsibility and see how we can initiate an alternative result by choosing to respond in a different way.

If we allow our lives to be a function of our conditioning, we subconsciously empower them to control us. When we react we let such things as the weather influence how we feel, we allow others to treat us disrespectfully and then blame them for how we feel. It is not their fault. We have a choice.

Being proactive means we take responsibility for our actions and recognise that we can choose how we respond based on our values and not a set of external factors.

Realise that you have the ability **to feel a certain way** at this moment in time; **to think a certain way** at this moment in time; **to respond in a certain way** at this moment in time. When you acknowledge this, then you will reap assertive rewards.

So that brings us to the end of what I hope has been another enlightening read. Your corner pieces are set and so your assertive jigsaw takes form. The next chapter presents a teasing taster of powerful strategies that have transformed past-participants' behaviour and will help you move forwards on your new assertive pathway. So turn with intrigue!

"Wisdom is knowledge applied."

Elyse Killoran, Coach

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"There is only one corner of the Universe that you can be certain of improving and that is your own self."

Aldous Huxley

5 The Magnificent Seven – Strategies

I guess if I was in your shoes right now, I would be screaming, 'So tell me how I do it.' And I realise that this first book has been a big ask. I have appealed to your reflective nature and asked you to be patient and, in many ways, to trust me to show you how to unlock the real issues holding your assertion back. Our instinct is so often **to do and thereby fix**, rather than **think and plan how to fix**. And we see so much of this in today's business world.

This chapter rewards your patience with the presentation of seven powerful strategies that have a proven record in my Assertiveness Workshops and helped clients master the art of authentic assertion.

This magnificent seven is not, of course the final prescription by any means. Part 3 will give you even more situational specific techniques. Although in my experience, I have found that by mastering these simple strategies and building on your self-awareness, you have plenty in your armoury to make a difference.

5.1 Thinking Strategies

I have grouped the following three strategies into approaches for your mind. By thinking differently, you will behave differently. Here is a mental muscle workout.

5.1.1 Circles of Influence

Adapted from Stephen Covey's model, this first strategy is about prioritising where you invest your energy and limiting the amount you worry.

When you realise what is in your control to change or influence you begin to see challenges and problems through completely different lenses. You start to develop proactive thinking and let go of a whole heap of 'stuff' that gets you down.

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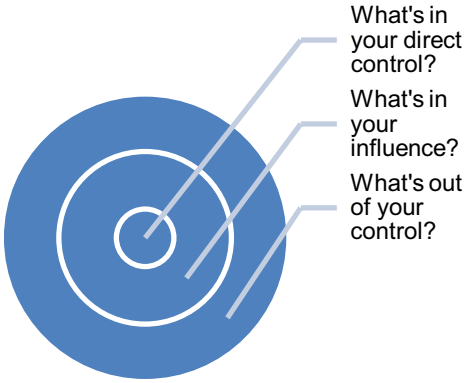
Let's face it, we all have different things that cause us worry and anxiety. I think about my and my family's health; whether my readers will gain value from my books; the amount of Genetically Modified Organism's (GMOs) in our food.

Using the Circles of Influence and other models, I have learnt to manage my mind, to a large degree, and so my worries are less intense.

Other worries might include money, family safety, meeting deadlines, travelling, difficult work performance issues or the latest Government recommendations. Some of these we can tackle, whilst others are less in our power to change.

Circles of Influence invites you to categorise what you worry about into three areas:



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This includes all the things that you have both the right and opportunity to change immediately, anything that concerns you and your surrounding environment that doesn't involve anyone else directly. This encompasses how you respond, how you think and how you feel.

Example

My health worries triggered me to attend Health seminars and I studied Naturopathic Nutrition and read health-oriented books. This helped me see my well-being differently and consequently my worry has decreased because I changed what was in my direct control.

There will undoubtedly be things you worry about that you have little or no responsibility to change, typically involving other people. We waste so much energy trying to persuade them to see our view and then get frustrated when they ignore us. Yet we have no right to change anyone except ourselves.

There will also be situations that are outside your remit yet cause you anxiety, like the performance of another team. You cannot directly control this and if you tried, it would most likely create a confrontation.

So instead, realise that although you cannot change it or them, you can influence the situation, through dialogue, reports, sharing knowledge and observations, giving feedback and coaching. Perhaps you could talk to the team's line manager about what you notice and offer some feedback on the situation.

Example

When I realised there was little I could do to control my family's health, my worry changed. After all, their health is their responsibility. What I can do though is share my knowledge and through my influence and good practice hope that they take the opportunity to improve their lifestyle. When I let go of this, my anxiety lessened in intensity.

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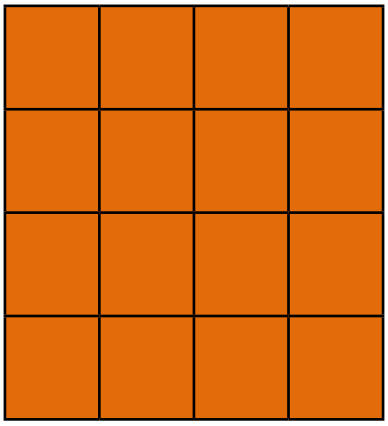
The third category incorporates those things that are completely out of your control, yet invest a disproportionate amount of time worrying about. This might include global warming, your IT system down time, nuclear war threats, the Government's decision on Tax rises or the closure of part of your company.

Example

My worries over GMOs; although an increasing concern, I cannot change Government policy over this directly. Could I influence it in any way? Perhaps I could work with groups who are trying to stop GM crops. In a more direct way I could research modified foods that may be in my diet and remove them or better still, just grow my own!

Rather than worrying, take direct control of what you can do, rather than over-dramatising the issue and wasting energy. Invest your energies more wisely and focus on what you can control or influence and if there is nothing you can do, then let it go.

5.1.2 How Many Squares?



For those of you on Facebook, you may have seen this doing the rounds. The exercise simply asks you to count the squares. What number do you come up with? 16, 17, 21, or 25?

My answer is **30** when to take into account the **one** whole square, the **sixteen** small squares, the **nine** 2×2 squares and the **four** 3×3 squares.

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Irrespective of your answer there is an interesting moral to the story. It is not so much how many squares you see, it is how many more than sixteen you can see? Do you:

- only see what is immediately in front of you or can you,
- see beyond the basic formula and appreciate the bigger picture?

It is too easy to make instant judgements that blind us from what is really there. Those perceptions can dangerously limit our potential and all because we don't look beyond what is in front of us.

So avoid 'Judging a book by its cover.' Be prepared to have an open mind to people, things and events and be more inquisitive, before you pass judgement. You will have a better quality experience.

5.1.3 Hilltops Revisited

For this strategy, I would like to take you back to Chapter 3, where I introduced the concept of a hilltop, made up of your life's experiences that collectively shape how you see the world.

That principle asked you to focus on *your* hilltop. Now, as a specific thinking strategy, I would like you to explore *other people's* hilltops and learn the art of appreciation.

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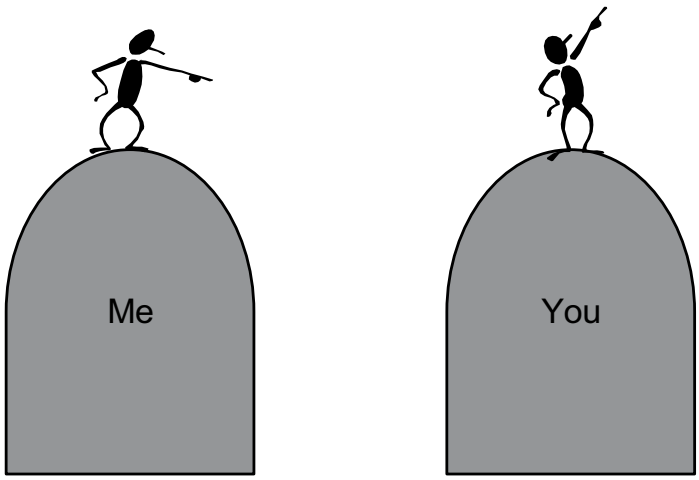

One of the key ingredients to assertion is developing a greater appreciation of people's differences. When we realise it is ok to be different and we embrace that difference, it frees us up from our judgements and criticisms to behave in a more assertive way.

The expanded hilltop concept allows us to do this. Return to your hilltop reflections and consider whether your boss, your closest friend or your partner has the same hilltop as you. Whilst they will have the same four headings, their experiences will be completely different.

Suddenly their hilltop has a very different formation to ours. Their views, assumptions, mind-sets and behaviours will match their unique experiences, and hence their interpretation of the world will be completely unlike yours.

As an assertive strategy, it's worth taking time to review how the hilltop concept explains the reason for a conflict and what may drive someone's interaction, based on their experiences.

Not all your relationships will be robust enough to allow you to get to know the intimate details of their hilltop, although simply knowing that theirs is likely to be different can be enough. Learning to appreciate other's uniqueness is an art, and definitely a strategy to apply when trying to form better quality relationships and when working through confrontation.

5.2 Behaving Strategies

This series of four strategies focuses on **doing** something different.

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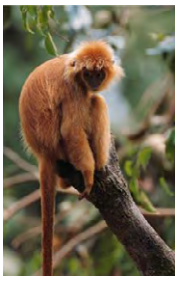
5.2.1 Monkey Let Go!



This is my personal favourite. Ten years ago, I attended a Meditation course run by a Buddhist monk. His training was filled with inspirational stories, which I still share to this day and the monkey is one that stands out.

I am pleased to say that the following story is fictional. It tells of how the ancient Japanese captured monkeys as part of the fur trade. It is said that hunters went into the forest to lay traps in the ground. They carefully dug a hole, deep and wide enough to place a narrow-necked jar into it. They placed the jar in the hole and then covered around it with soil, leaving the jar's neck still visible.

The hunters cut up an apple, placed it into the jar and took their leave, returning to the village for a glass of Saki. Meanwhile, the monkeys, who had been watching from the safety of their lofty branches, ventured down to the forest floor so they could capture their prize. Surely, it was too easy.

The monkeys gingerly placed their hands into the jar and reached for the apple. Gathering up as many of the pieces as they could, they started to pull out their hands, motivated by the feast awaiting them. Alas, they were so full of apple that their hand would no longer fit through the jar's narrow neck.

Try as they might, they could not pull out from the jar and return to the safety of their trees, armed with their treasure. Yet with grit and determination they held onto that apple, hoping that some divine intervention would release them from their trap. Little did they realise that just simply letting go of the apple would secure them their freedom, which was about to be stolen.

After a while, the hunters returned to the forest to find the monkeys still working out an escape route and in one simple move, the monkeys were slain and the next trap set.

If only the monkeys had released the apple, they would have been free to live their lives. Sadly, they paid the price of holding onto something they thought was important, yet kept them trapped and finally paying the ultimate price.

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So I put it to you… how many apples are you holding onto that cause you headaches? What would happen if you let go of those unnecessary issues or worries? What freedom could you experience by just letting go?

Example

After hearing this story, I found myself unclenching my fist at the slightest worry, symbolically letting go of what held me captive. To this day, my husband sees me worrying and says, 'Karen, just let go of the monkey!' Now he doesn't have quite the right imagery, although the point still stands. As Richard Carlson writes in his book, 'Don't sweat the small stuff.'

5.2.2 Traffic Lights – Three Little Words

It is the simplicity of this strategy that me and my clients love, combining a bit of thinking and doing.

Whilst I appreciate that whatever country you live in, your traffic lights may have a slightly different sequence, it is the colours I'm more interested in than the light pattern per se.

The essence of the Traffic Light theory is that it helps you change from a reaction to a response mechanism.

Picture the scene. Imagine you're in a meeting and a debate arises between two colleagues. They look to you for your input, what do you do? Your natural instinct is to join the foray, adding your views or to freeze, feeling 'put on the spot'. Either way, both reactions are unhealthy and unconstructive.

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Here is an alternative:

At red, **Stop**. Bite your tongue, breathe, mentally hold yourself back from interjecting or say, 'Let me think about this for a minute,' to buy yourself some time.

At amber, **Think**. Consider the options, given the characters involved and the outcome you desire. Think about the consequence of those options and what feels most comfortable for you. This is generally processed in moments, although it might feel like forever.

At green, **Choose**. Having invested in good quality thinking time, you are ready to choose the best approach, with an increased assurity of a better outcome. Although this is of course, never guaranteed, you will at least improve your chances of success.

Three little words: S**top, Think, Choose**. It will prevent you from speaking out inappropriately or saying nothing when you really want to contribute.

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5.2.3 The Power of Questions

Marketers and advertisers use them. Coaches and trainers use them. Interviewers use them. Do you use them?

Questions! That's what I'm banging on about. I believe **questions**, **listening** and **playback** are three of the most important skills we can learn to become more effective. Once we have mastered these skills, we open up a whole new dimension of better quality relationships, value-led leadership and successful results.

When you master the art of asking good quality questions, rather than making statements, and I mean good, old-fashioned **open questions** you begin to unlock the key to your assertive success. Remember the Rudyard Kipling poem?

"I kept six honest serving men; they taught me all I knew.
Their names were what and why and where and when and where and who."

5.2.4 Mars Bar Brinciple – Balance

I am sure you have heard the Mars advert so many times in years gone by:

'A Mars and day helps you work, rest and play.'

This is an old marketing strap-line that has been around for decades promoting the Mars Bar. What has this got to do with assertive development?

Quite a lot really, because the advert suggests that the chocolate gives you the energy and sustenance to fulfil all areas of your life and not be a slave to one or another. In other words giving you what you need to achieve a better life balance. (From a nutritional viewpoint I challenge this, although that aside, my focus is the principle of the advert!)

We can therefore use the analogy to help us connect with assertiveness's lure of greater energy, positivity, calmness, esteem and balance. All of which free us up to live and work to our full potential rather than living on our all-too-often frayed edge of existence.

Now I am not suggesting for a minute that you eat a Mars Bar a day, although when you invest in the Mars principle and rebalance the way that you think, feel and behave, you too will have all the fuel you need to feel professionally and personally fulfilled.

This brings us to the end of Chapter 5 and what I hope has been an interesting meander through the nursery beds of our assertive landscape. More of this will come in Part 3, where we expand our exploration into specific situations that require a more assertive approach.

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In the meantime, I genuinely hope that this *inside-out* philosophy has opened up a completely new aspect and how, what you have experienced in the past shapes how you behave in today's corporate world. With your new insights, I now invite you to complete this first phase of your fascinating introspective journey, with some action planning.

"Knowing alone is not good enough. You need to apply what you know if you want to change."

Karen Davies, Coach

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"Before you score you must first have a goal."

Proverb

6 Action Planning

Much has been reported about Harvard studies that show the correlation between goal setting and success achievement. Whether these studies are truth or falacy matters less than the premise that if you want something to change you have to have a focus on what you want to change.

In my coaching experience when there is enough desire to change, then this creates a momentum that needs no pressure, forcing or pushing. Desire creates an innate propulsion that carries us forward. Armed with a clear focus on what you want to be different, commitment to see it through and diligent application, you can turn your goals into reality.

The most successful clients and participants have been those so determined to change that they don't need to make pledges to anyone else except themselves. They've reached a point where there are no doubts about whether to take action – it's been about **what** action am I going to take?

This section is short and sweet and gives you an opportunity to think about how you translate your eBook learning into something tangible that can make a difference to you. After all the time you have invested in studying the words and doing the exercises, surely you need to now convert that into something valuable, meaningful and productive?

6.1 Six Steps to Making Change Happen

Surprise surpise! There is a process for this – a simple one, although a process none-the-less.

6.1.1 Step 1 – Review your Learning

Reflecting back on the exercises you've completed, think about what stood out, resonated or meant something to you. There has been plenty to contemplate, so collecting your thoughts and gathering up what have been the most useful discoveries is an important step before you begin translating those into goals.

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Learning Review

Return to each chapter, noting down the elements that have struck a chord with you.

Then go back to Chapter 2 specifically, where I asked you to consider your vision and what you wanted to achieve by reading this eBook. Based on that information, what have you learned and discovered?

6.1.2 Step 2 – Review your Goals

As you review your original goals, you may feel that they don't work for you or that they are too woolly, especially given your discoveries. Rest assured this is quite natural. Visions and goals need to be flexible and adaptive, so use them as a reference point. If you believe your goals need to change, carry on to the Goal Review exercise below, otherwise move on to Step 3.

Goal Review

If your original goals need to change, rewrite what you want to achieve based on your learning. Consider what you want to look, sound and feel like in a year.

With your goals revised, you can now return to your learning review notes and identify which discoveries will most help you achieve your goals over the coming year.

6.1.3 Step 3 – Your Inspirations

When we are inspired to do something then nothing stops us. Think back to a time when you've had a real passion, an energy to do say a marathon, prepare for a promotion interview or work for a charity that's close to your heart. Even though you are busy, you make time for inspirational activities. If you have a high **Need for Growth**, (Chapter 4), then you won't need passion, as you will be inspired enough by your desire to satisfy that need.

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Your Inspirations

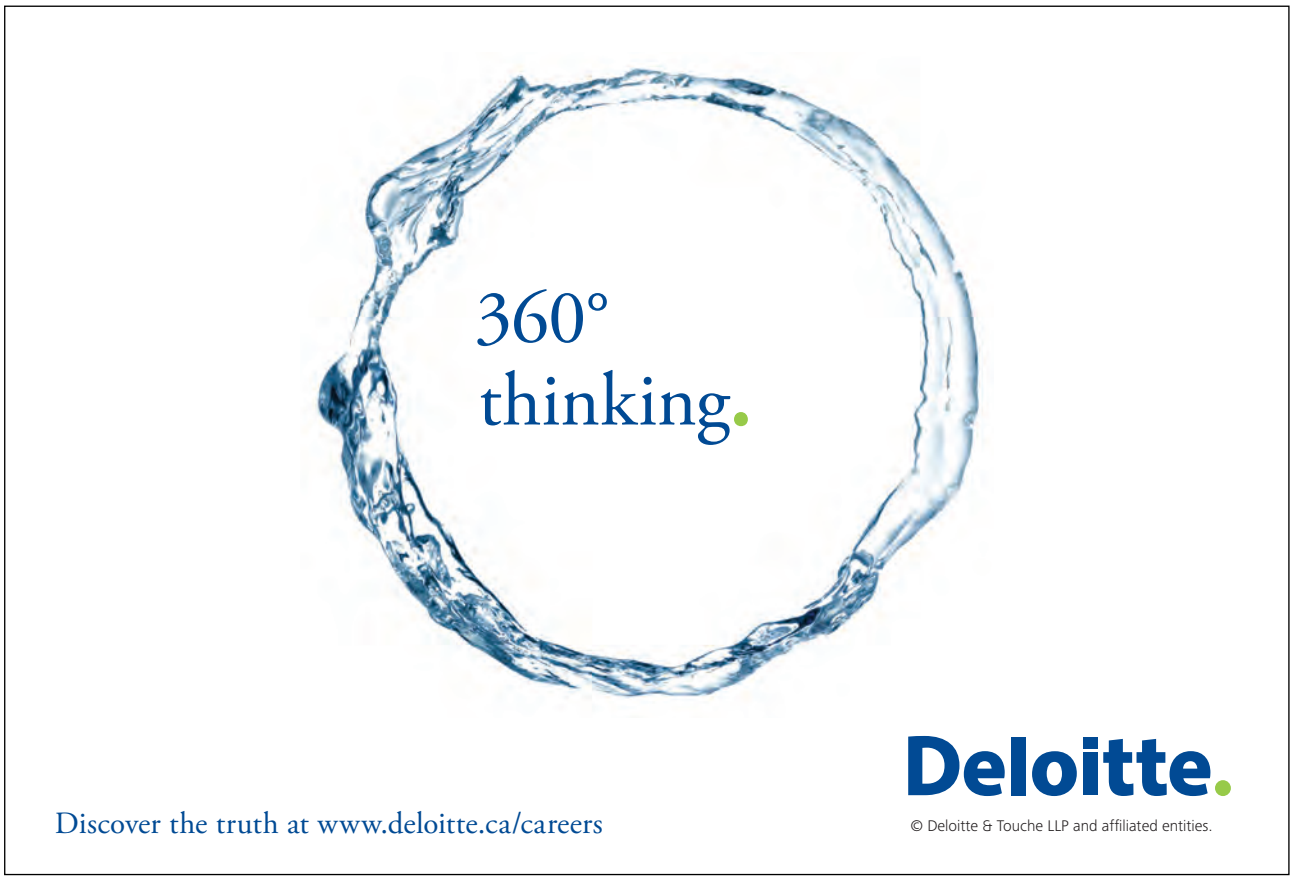
Albert Einstein said, 'Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration'. This may be true, although if we don't have inspiration in the first place, then our perspiration is wasted sweat.

List what you feel most inspired to do differently that will help you towards your newly revised goals in Chapter 2. Only list three things so that you keep focused.

6.1.4 Step 4 – Return Of The 'Six Honest Serving Men'!

In the last chapter I suggested improving the quality of your questioning technique. It is now time to employ that skill in setting your action plan.

Taking the three most relevant inspirations that have had the greatest impact on you, formulate each one into a measurable and tangible action using the following six questions:



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What: will you specifically do differently and what will it give you?

Why: is this action important to you?

How: will you approach achieving this action, how often, how well, how many?

When: will you do this, over what period?

Who: will need to support you and who is involved?

Where: will this goal take place, home, work, socially? Be specific by stating whether it is at meetings, talking to your boss, when handling a difficult customer.

This now gives your actions structure and helps them become meaningful statements of intent.

6.1.5 Step 5 – Do and Review

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit." Aristotle

It is now time to take action and repeated action at that. Inspired by your commitments, you need to go forth and apply yourself. To help you, here is some guidance about making it a long-lasting change and not just a 'five minute wonder'.

- **Focus only on three commitments.** If you adopt any more it will become like a shopping list, often overwhelming and soon forgotten. When you have changed those commitments into new habits, then you can identify your next set of actions.
- **Repeat your actions regularly.** The more you repeat, the more you hone and gain in confidence. After all, *'Repetition is the Mother of skill.'*
- **Involve people in your changes.** Talk to people close to you about your changes, especially family and friends. With their inclusion you secure their support rather than create fear, suspicion or threat. When I implemented a big change to my language, I asked for my team's help in spotting when I used negative words and they became a factor of my success.
- **Carry out regular reviews and document your successes**. The more you assess your progress and celebrate what is going well, the more momentum you will experience. You will also be more in tune with what is working less well and be able to make adjustments. During a twelve-month leadership programme, I encouraged participants to produce an Evidence Portfolio that recorded specific examples of their progress. They collected samples of emails, wrote situational summaries, asked colleagues for feedback and copied letters of thanks they received. This review mechanism helped them produce long-lasting behavioural changes.

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- **Celebrate your successes**. It is important to acknowledge what is going well. Share those successes with colleagues, friends who will be interested, your partner or boss. The act of sharing itself reinforces the positivity of the action and inspires you to continue.

6.1.6 Step 6 – Commit to Paper

If you like formality and structure, then I encourage you to adopt a form similar to this to help you.

Action Planning Form

Learning event: Your Assertive Development Journey – Part 1

Date: / /20

Inspired action	What it will give me	Support required	Progress and evidence
1.			
2.			
3.			

Now armed with a dash of knowledge, a splash of hope and a pinch of inspiration, you have all you need to create an authentic assertive change.

I encourage you to use the next **four to six weeks** to experiment, talk, journalise and reflect on what is going well and what still needs some work before you head towards the next exciting instalment in this Assertive Trilogy.

If this first book in the series has piqued your curiosity, then the second will intrigue you even further. We delve into a critical source of our success; **how we communicate**, both the internal dialogue we call our thoughts, self-talk, fears and doubts; and externally through our interactions with others.

We explore the science of the brain and consider what role it plays in our effectiveness. We discuss how, what you think affects your destiny and how to reframe your mental self-worth programmes to achieve greater results.

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Armed with a new vocabulary, I show you a process that eradicates your fears, irrational beliefs and self-imposed doubts increasing the quality of what you say to **yourself** and **others** by 100%. You then have a brain cleared for action – positive, purposeful and powerful action. A new, more confident you awaits. See you next time!

"The best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time."

Abraham Lincoln

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References

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Take Time for Your Life	Cheryl Richardson
Assert Yourself	Gael Lindenfield
How to Develop Assertiveness	Sam R Lloyd
Know Yourself	Ellen Balke
Unleash the Giant Within	Anthony Robbins
Seven Habits of Highly Effective People	Stephen Covey